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ABSTRACT

The percentage of speech communication doctoral graduates employed full time and the percentage working in academic institutions have declined considerably since 1968. The glut of humanities doctorates appears to present three courses of action: increase undergraduate enrollments, decrease graduate enrollments, or increase nonacademic employment opportunities for doctorates. Increased college costs and reduced financial aid are likely to adversely affect the first option. The current, modest downward trend in the number of speech doctoral programs supports the second option, since the best way to increase the marketability of doctoral graduates in speech is to decrease their supply. There is still skepticism from both academic and business communities as to the prospects of humanities doctorates finding employment in business and industry, but a number of institutions have developed counseling and placement procedures aimed at helping graduate students find jobs in nonacademic settings. Such programs include workshops on job searching and interviewing techniques, and putting students in contact with recruiters for leading corporations. Most speech faculty members believe that heavily research-oriented graduate programs are the best sort of training for the nonacademic as well as the academic job market. (HTH)

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ADAPTING TO THE JOB MARKET:

GRADUATE PROGRAMS IN SPEECH COMMUNICATION

A paper presented to the
annual conference of the
Central States Speech Association
April 10, 1981

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Judging from the number of investigations conducted, conferences convened, and papers presented and published during the past few years, a lot of people are concerned about the future of college graduates, at both the bachelor's and the advanced degree levels. Whenever a problem receives this much attention, one of two things is apt to be the case: either the issue has become trendy and, as a consequence, been subjected to more study than it deserves, or the problem really is so complex and has such far-reaching implications that it warrants every bit of the attention it has received, and probably more.

With regard to the topic of this program, I must confess that my initial inclination, as I began to prepare, was toward the former interpretation. In fact, it crossed my mind that an appropriate response at this point might be for me to suggest that we adjourn the meeting and reconvene in the bar. Upon further reflection, however, three factors seemed to contravene the wisdom of that idea: first, it occurred to me that Professors Elmore and Bormann (whose papers are scheduled to follow this one) would probably view the suggestion with all of the enthusiasm with which Casper Weinberger received Alexander Haig's "I'm in charge here" statement following the recent attempt on the life of President Reagan; second, there appeared a strong likelihood, if we did indeed regroup at the bar, that you would expect me to buy a round; third, I

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came across some evidence suggesting that graduate programs in speech communication may soon face problems with regard to the recruitment and placement of students of a magnitude with which, apparently, most of us have not yet had to cope. The enterprise to which this panel is devoted, in other words, would appear, as my former mentor Professor Bormann used to say, every bit "worth the candle."

A "Survey of Doctorate Recipients," conducted in 1977 under the auspices of the Commission of Human Resources, revealed some ominous trends. In contrasting those who received doctoral degrees in the humanities (a category which, by the way, included speech and communication) between 1934 and 1968 with those who received degrees during the first half of the 1970s, researchers found that whereas 96 percent of the men and 86 percent of the women in the earlier group were employed full-time, for the latter group the figures had fallen 9 points to 87 percent for men, and 17 points to 69 percent for women. Furthermore, "only 79.2 percent of the employed 1972-76 humanities Ph.D.'s were working in institutions of higher education compared with 90.7 percent of the 1934-68 cohert."[1]

This situation has further deteriorated since 1977. An article in the spring, 1980, issue of Rackham Reports notes that although "nine out of ten Ph.D. students in the humanities and social sciences in American universities expect to find university teaching jobs," the number of doctorates now produced annually in these areas exceeds by eight times the number of available faculty positions. Furthermore, "a sizable portion of available jobs are not considered 'satisfactory' because they may be temporary, non-tenure-track appointments."[2]

Relief from this dismal situation, unfortunately, does not appear imminent. The coordinator of doctoral programs for the New York State

Department of Education, for example, predicts that by 1990 some 60,000 Ph.D.s in the humanities and social sciences will not have found the teaching jobs they seek.[3] This prognosis was confirmed by a recent Carnegie Council report which sees "no improvement in the academic job market before the end of the century."[4]

The victims of this lack of employment opportunity are not confined only to recent and future holders of graduate degrees. Those currently employed in colleges and universities, but who for some reason or another find themselves in unfulfilling positions, are also victimized by the limited mobility imposed on them by a tight academic job market. The low morale resulting from such conditions constitutes an increasing problem for institutions of higher education around the country. Even those of us fortunate enough to like our jobs and enjoy the security of tenure may be vitally affected by the glut of doctorates in the humanities and social sciences. As David Smith, Dean of the College of Arts and Letters at the University of South Florida, put it in his address to last summer's Washington conference on communication careers:

> If we educators are honest with ourselves, we have to admit that we are here because of FTE's. Between 1950 and 1970 the college-age population more than doubled. But college-type jobs only went up 6%. We began to worry about students getting jobs and then about our own enrollments. Students began going to business schools instead of the Liberal Arts colleges. So now we are afraid of losing our jobs.[5]

Whether our principal concern is for our students or for ourselves, the diminishing opportunities for faculty careers in the humanities and social sciences would seem to constitute a problem about which all of us ought to be concerned. In approaching the issue, three major courses of action appear possible: (1) increase undergraduate enrollments; (2) decrease graduate

enrollments; (3) increase nonacademic employment opportunities for graduate degree recipients.

Increasing undergraduate enrollments. Considering that the number of 18-year-olds in the population has declined 3.4 percent since the peak was reached in 1979, college educators have been delighted by the fact that freshman applications for next fall are up some 13 percent from 1980. Credit for the increase is attributed both to "a lack of attractive jobs" for high school graduates and to "more intensive recruiting campaigns by many institutions."[6] Actual enrollments for next fall, as well as into the future, however, are likely to be adversely affected by dramatically increased college costs, on the one hand, and by substantially reduced financial aid opportunities, on the other.

Although speech communication programs have enjoyed great popularity during the past several years, they will not be immune to the same population trends and cost factors which are almost certain to reduce college enrollments in the years to come. Furthermore, in spite of our best efforts to increase their marketability, and in spite of the social significance of communicative activity, there is a limit to the number of speech communication graduates the economy can absorb. The large number of majors we are currently producing suggests to me that that limit may soon be reached. For all of these reasons, therefore, increasing undergraduate enrollments does not appear a promising solution to the oversupply of Ph.D.s.

Decreasing graduate enrollments. Although educators seem particularly ineffectual in adapting to changing conditions, the market forces of supply and demand do eventually take their toll. According to a report in Newsweek magazine, for example, "in many fields, universities have cut back Ph.D. production by about one-third, and would trim even more if they didn't need

teaching assistants and research aides."[7] Corroborating this report, John W. Eadie, history professor at the University of Michigan and current chairman of the Michigan Council for the Humanities, "predicts the closing of numerous Ph.D. programs that were started in the 1960s at small colleges with inadequate faculties and libraries, resulting in an increase in students at the better institutions."[8]

There is some indication that a similar pattern may be emerging in speech communication. According to the most recent issue of the Directory of Graduate Programs in the Speech Communication Arts and Sciences, the number of departments offering the doctorate grew from 57 in 1968 to 93 in 1973, a 63 percent increase in five years.[9] During this same period, ironically, job listings with the SCA Placement Service declined by 44.3 percent, from 936 in 1968-69 to 521 during 1973-74.[10] Between 1973 and 1975, however, the number of Ph.D. granting departments declined by four to a total of 89, and then dropped by one more in 1977.[11] The next issue of the Directory, hopefully, will indicate a continuation and acceleration of this modest downward trend. In the final analysis, the most effective way of increasing the marketability of Ph.D.s in speech communication is by decreasing their supply.

Increasing nonacademic employment opportunities for graduate degree recipients. The prospect of Ph.D.s in the humanities and social sciences finding employment in business and industry has not been greeted with unmitigated enthusiasm by either side. As Roy Chustek of the Modern Language Association puts it, "many academics consider business cutthroat and intellectually unstimulating," and "business still thinks of Ph.D.'s as dreamy-eyed people who eventually will go back into teaching."[12] Despite this scepticism, however, a number of significant developments aimed at the rapproachment of graduate education and the corporate world have taken place.

Most notable in our own field, perhaps, was the creation in 1978 of the SCA Task Force on Alternative Careers in Communication. Although not directed specifically at graduate education, the Task Force has sponsored four major studies, held convention programs, published a newsletter, and co-sponsored two summer conferences. In short, this group has produced and disseminated a variety of information which should prove useful to those in our field wishing to adapt instructional programs to the employment needs of their students.

Approaching the problem from a different angle, a number of institutions have developed counseling and placement procedures aimed at helping graduate students to attain employment in nonacademic settings. One of the first and most elaborate of these programs was established at the University of Michigan in 1976. There, the Office of Nonacademic Career Counseling and Placement for Graduate Students has conducted workshops in job-searching, resume writing, and interviewing techniques, as well as counseling thousands of people in individual conferences and putting students in contact with recruiters for some of the nation's leading corporations.[13]

Perhaps the most promising development in the effort to bridge academia and industry has been the establishment of summer institutes of the type first begun under NEH sponsorship three years ago at New York University. In its advertisement in The Chronicle, NYU's Graduate School of Business Administration invites "recent Ph.D.s and A.B.D.s in the humanities and related social sciences . . . to enter the national competition for 50 places in the intensive summer program designed to orient them in substantive areas of business administration. Placement services are offered by the School and interviews with major corporations and organizations in the public sector are provided."[14] The success of NYU's program has led to the creation of similar institutes at the universities of Virginia, Texas, Pennsylvania, and Harvard.

Although these workshops typically provide intensive orientations to such business related subjects as accounting and statistics, economics and finance, and marketing and management, the essence of each of the programs is the concept of "transferable skills." The University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School states the point explicitly in its promotional brochure: "Ph.D.s have highly developed writing and rhetorical skills, analytic abilities, and organizational talents. They have also learned to work well under pressure. These qualities are all directly relevant to large numbers of nonacademic careers."

Responses to an unsystematic survey which I conducted last fall suggest, although graduate programs in speech communication vary from those with no interest at all in the nonacademic job market to those which have made specific curricular adaptations to it, that the element of transferable skills may be stronger in our field than in most others. Samuel L. Becker, Chairman of the Department of Communication and Theatre Arts at the University of Iowa, for example, writes:

> Most of us believe that our regular, heavily research oriented graduate programs are the best sort of training for the non-academic as well as the academic job market. I think that the success of our graduate students who have chosen to go the non-academic route supports that."

Echoing Becker's sentiments, Dennis S. Gouran, Acting Chairperson of the Department of Speech Communication at Indiana University, noted:

> There has not been any systematic effort to adapt our graduate program to the non-academic job market. In spite of that, an increasing number of our graduate students enroll in the program with a view toward employment in non-academic areas. . . . It is my impression that many non-academic employers are interested in hiring Ph.D. holders in communication to deal

precisely with the kinds of problems on which we focus in programs of an academic nature. . . . I guess all of this is to say that I am not sure that programs of the type we now have require a great deal of adaptation. What may be more important is the encouragement of graduate students pursuing advanced degrees to look more at non-academic positions than they are prone to do.

The high level of transferable skills involved in speech communication graduate work not only allows academics from our discpline to move with relative ease into the world of business, as Becker and Gouran have pointed out, but also attracts those from business to academic studies in speech communication. This natural attractiveness has been further enhanced, in one instance, by the Department of Speech-Communication at the University of Minnesota through a "Late Afternoon/Evening" program which it advertises as: "Special Availability not a Special Degree." Commenting on the program, Robert L. Scott, departmental chairman, notes that "one thing it does is get a mix of 'people from downtown' in with 'regular' students. That may be adaptive and therefore have survival potential."

Although the transferable skills resulting from graduate study in speech communication, combined with a bit of special scheduling, may be sufficient to meet the instructional objectives of some departments, others have decided that their interests can be best served by more specific curricular adjustments to the needs of nonacademic job markets. The most frequent example of such adaptation has been the recent proliferation of new sequences in organizational communication, as well as the strengthening and refinement of more established programs. At Purdue University, for example, a long tradition in this area has contributed to a circumstance in which the vast majority of graduate students arrive with the intention of majoring in organizational communication.

Much like organizational communication, but even more closely related to the specific demands of the job market, is the emerging interest of speech communication departments in the study of public relations. Illustrative of this trend are the degree options in Corporate Advocacy introduced at the University of Houston in 1978. "The intent," according to Robert L. Heath, Director of Graduate Studies,

> was to use most of the courses traditional to rhetoric, public address, and communication theory. These courses would take on an employment slant leading toward careers in public relations. . . . The students find this program attractive, and we have had fairly good success placing our graduates in non-academic jobs.

Heath concludes his letter with some insights into the hazards involved in naming a new program. "The big problem," he writes,

> is the reaction of the public relations professionals. Many are upset that we selected "advocacy" as a part of the program title. Our university is upset that we put "corporate" together with "advocacy"; some faculty and administrators see this as a sell-out to big business. The public relations professionals are upset that we used a title, other than public relations, at a time when a battle is being waged to give respectability to public relations. So, as attractive as our program is, we have some problems. We may abandon the title and undertake one more acceptable to the professionals.

Whether or not it has caused them problems, the fact is that a number of departments have resorted to unconventional labels to describe new graduate programs adapted specifically to the nonacademic job market. At Texas Christian University, for example, a program called Communication in Human Relations is designed to prepare students at both graduate and undergraduate

levels for careers in public relations and advertising, social agencies, law, and marketing and sales, to mention only four of the nine career areas detailed in their promotional materials. Department Chairman, Ralph R. Behnke, says of the program that it is not only "the most popular . . . in the Department of Speech Communication," but that it is "as popular with prospective employees as it is with university students."

A similar program at Ohio State University, called The Communication Analyst Study Track, is adaptable to career preparation, at the master's degree level, ranging from management, to religion and health care, and five other areas. At the doctoral degree level, Ohio State offers a special curriculum entitled Communication in the Public Interest, which is intended to prepare its graduates for work in a broad spectrum of agencies, both within and outside of government.

At Oklahoma State University a program in Speech Communication Consultancy pursues instructional objectives similar to those of Texas Christian and Ohio State, but stresses the instructional method of the practicum or internship. Commenting on the importance of this approach, acting department chairman, Jim Hughey, writes: "Let me emphasize that the key to our applied communication approach is our 'practicum' orientation. Although what we do in our theory courses and quantitative courses are not so different . . . , the student's program builds toward the practicum experience." It seems reasonable to predict that as more and more graduate programs aim toward nonacademic employment, the utilization of internships for graduate students will become increasingly common.

Despite these changes in speech communication graduate curriculums, however; despite the profusion of task forces, convention programs, and journal articles; and despite the nearly irrefutable evidence of a substantial surplus

of doctorates in the humanities and social sciences, I have the distinct impression that most of us in this field just aren't very concerned about the issue. Although it's true that most of those responding to my request for information indicated that their departments were doing little or nothing to adapt to the nonacademic job market, it isn't the lack of activity that troubles me, but the lack of apparent concern. As one Big Ten department chairperson wrote, the issue "is one that our faculty should be discussing and to this point has not."

Perhaps this lack of a sense of urgency indicates that graduate programs in speech communication are indeed different from those in other areas of the humanities and social sciences; it may be that our information society will continue to consume all of the expertise in communication that our graduate programs can produce. On the other hand, our field's recent high levels of popularity, both on the campus and in the work place, may be a cyclical phenomenon which has led us into unwarranted complacency. Whatever the case, the stakes are too high for any of us in speech communication education to remain indifferent to the potential consequences.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Betty D. Maxfield and Susan M. Henn, Employment of Humanities Ph.D.'s: A Departure from Traditional Jobs (Washington, DC, National Academy of Sciences, 1980), p. xii.

[2]Dale Mathews and Mary Easthope, "Of Ivory Towers, Fading Dreams, and the 9-5 World," Rackham Reports (Spring, 1980), p. 1.

[3]Ibid.

[4]Ibid.

[5]"Proceedings of the July 1980 SCA/ICA/ACA Washington Summer Conference: Communication Careers," Association for Communication Administration Bulletin (January, 1981), p. 44.

[6]The Chronicle of Higher Education (March 2, 1981), p. 1.

[7]Newsweek (February 4, 1980), p. 74.

[8]Mathews and Easthope, p. 3.

[9]Directoy of Graduate Programs in the Speech Communication Arts and Sciences 1977-1978 (Annondale, VA: The Speech Communication Association, 1976), p. vii.

[10]Robert N. Hall, "Hail to the New, Farewell to the Old," Association for Communication Administration Bulletin (January, 1981), pp. 23 & 28.

[11]Directory of Graduate Programs in the Speech Communication Arts and Sciences 1977-1978.

[12]Newsweek.

[13]Mathews and Easthope, p. 1.

[14]The Chronicle of Higher Education (November 17, 1980), p. 31.